

Sketch

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Night, Saturday

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Abstract

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ELLEN HASTINGS lounged against the flat pillows of her chenille-covered bed and feigned nonchalance. "I'm not sure I'd care to have a blind date tonight," she announced to the blonde Senior who leaned above her. And then, because the bold words tasted cool on her dry lips, she repeated the lie, "No, I'm not at all sure I'd care to."

The Senior's lower jaw dropped almost imperceptibly. "You'd better go"—the Senior was casual—"as a favor for a sorority sister, if nothing else."

"This time I'll let her squirm," Ellie thought. Seniors and their damned nonsense about helping out the sisters—"special favor for a sorority sister." What a laugh! Thinking of their own interests, that was all. What special favor had they ever done her? Didn't they think she knew why the Kappa Chi's had pledged her? "Yes, my dear, I know she's rather plain and hasn't much to offer but her aunt *was* our national chapter president last

year.” Even after a year she could still hear them whispering it, and the bitter words clanked through her mind over and over like a mimeograph slapping out a message—rather plain, rather plain.

The Senior talked on, less condescendingly now, but Ellie caught only wisps of her conversation. “. . . and by mistake I made two dates for tonight.” By mistake! She’d planned it all the time, that’s what she’d done, probably so some nice guy couldn’t ask another girl out. Two dates for one night—oh, it wasn’t fair!

The Senior was delivering an ultimatum now. “Of course, Ellie, if you’d rather sit home all night—” Outside her door Ellie could hear the Kappa Chi house bustling in a maze of giggles and shrieks of gaiety, the rat-tat of spray against shower curtains, and the heavenly clatter of doorbell, buzzers and telephones.

The Senior threw her ace on the table. “—And it’s not every girl I’d ask to take over for me on a date with Bill Hurland.”

Ellie dropped her studied listlessness and bounced to a sitting position.

“Bill Hurland?” she echoed.

The Senior smiled, all superiority. “*The* Bill Hurland, darling. He’ll be here at eight. You will go, won’t you?”

“Yes, I’ll go.” The words flowed so softly that had the Senior not expected them she would not have heard. “Yes, I’ll go.” Bill Hurland! three-letter man, president of student council, idol of every sweater and skirt on the campus. And she, Ellie Hastings, had a date with him.

The senior, her mission accomplished, patted flawlessly combed blonde hair and strolled to the door. “Perhaps I’d better warn you, Ellie; he has quite a line.” The door slammed shut from the outer side to punctuate an amused giggle from the senior.

Ellie giggled too. Oh, she’d show them. This time she would. They expected her to go out tonight and smile, “Hello, Bill”—“No, Bill”—“Yes, Bill”—oh, but she’d show them.

She splashed through a shower while steam billowed through her long bob in a delicious aura of warmish fog. Wonderful shower. Wonderful Senior. Mm, wonderful life.

Minutes flew by and Ellie wasted none of them. Suddenly it was eight o’clock. She stood with her eyes closed and head bowed before the long mirror on her door as if it were a shrine. “Dear

God, let me be smooth—not even beautiful, just smooth. Let me show them just once.” She opened her eyes experimentally. For one breathless instant she surveyed her image. Then her lips parted. “Thank you, God, thank you,” she breathed.

She stood there, a tall girl in an orchid wool dress (this orchid color will do so much for your hair, the clerk had said) and flat-heeled pumps. Yes, she decided, smooth. Her hair looked longer than it ever had and the curl at the ends was just right; mascara on her eyelashes put misty depth in her gray eyes. She was glad she’d bought that new lipstick; Bill Hurland would be glad too. Why, she wasn’t a bit afraid. Oh, she’d show them.

Bzzz. Bzz. Little electric bees flapped their wings sharply and her buzzer rang. She grabbed the furry armful that was her coat and stretched a hand toward the door knob. Mustn’t be late, the books said. She jerked open the door and raced down the third floor hall toward the stairs. Suddenly she slowed her steps. The seniors didn’t walk that way; they let their dates wait and they could have two dates for one night. Ellie walked slowly and deliberately. Liltng music ran through her mind, not at all in pace with her footsteps. “I’m smooth, so smooth—Bill Hurland is waiting in the drawing room and I’m just like the seniors. They were wrong. I’m not even afraid—not even a little bit afraid. I’ll show them. Tonight I’m smooth.” She descended the long stairway from third floor to second; each carpeted step bounced beneath the lightness of her feet and it was as though she descended a whole flight of little innerspring mattresses.

Second floor, and the music had gained pace. “I’ll show them tonight—an orchid for my hair—Bill Hurland would like me because I’m smooth.” She laughed gleefully and lowered one foot to the stair in preparation for the final descent.

“Why, Ellie,” a voice smirked behind her. A senior! She could recognize their affected twang every time. She laughed. Let them talk. Nothing could hurt her tonight. She was smooth.

“Ellie,” the voice blasted in her ear, “your slip’s hanging two inches in back. Won’t you ever learn to be sm - - -”

The rest was drowned in a returning clank of bitter words: not smooth, rather plain, rather plain. Ellie halfway hitched up the lingerie and slouched down the last mile of stairway to another blind date.

“Hello, Bill,” she said. “Yes, I’m Ellie. Yes, Bill.”